

## **The Case of William Penrose by The-Mighty-Third-Draft**

**Category:** IT

**Genre:** Drama, Horror

**Language:** English

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2019-09-04 16:55:52

**Updated:** 2019-10-20 13:20:09

**Packaged:** 2019-12-12 05:33:01

**Rating:** M

**Chapters:** 4

**Words:** 12,626

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** Frannie Howard knew she was damned. When her routine assignment goes horribly wrong, Frannie must make the sacrifice that will either save or damn everyone she loves. AU (slightly) futuristic continuation of IT chapter 1. Eventual Implied Pennywise/Frannie. M for language/content.

# 1. Chapter 1

A/N - An AU extrapolation based on IT chapter 1. I haven't seen chapter 2. Enjoy.

---

The Case of William Penrose

August 2038.

Mackenzie had to be the driver. It was just one of her quirks. Today Frannie didn't mind so much because she'd barely slept. She drained the dregs of her Red Bull while the summer-scorching outskirts of Derry whipped past, injecting her with the scent of heat and dry grass. So far, Frannie thought it was quite pretty, above ground anyway. Mac drummed her gold-plated fingers on the VW wheel cover to inaudible music. A "Welcome to Derry" road sign flashed and Frannie finally admitted to herself that she was anxious about this assignment.

'You remember that werewolf in Arizona?' Mac smiled at her. Her full lips were painted crimson. Black roots showed under her pillar box red afro. Mac was beautiful with her Caribbean skin and straight teeth, more than Frannie could ever hope to be. She was the street pigeon next to Mac's peacock.

'The one you were drooling over?' Frannie asked.

'Any port in a storm.'

Frannie rolled her eyes.

'Seriously, it's part of the job. You find a weakness and exploit it.'

Slightly irritated, Frannie resisted the urge to say, *I know my job.*

'So. What do we know about the Freak?' Mac asked.

This was territory that Frannie was far more comfortable with. She flipped open the dog-eared lip of her messenger bag and drew out her long-suffering journal. She opened it where a novelty shark

bookmark poked its fine above the paper line.

'First sighting 1830 after a series of attacks on children. Vessel is William Penrose. He owned a traveling circus. Some tragedy in his family. Pennywise is an atypical, bonded spirit possession, exact entity unknown. Could be Baal. Possibly Abaddon. His abilities include superhuman strength, accelerated healing, telepathy, telekinesis and shape-shifting. The entity feeds on human fear, taking the form you fear the most. Penrose seems to have become an obligate carnivore in response to the occupation. He'll be impossible to separate without killing the host.'

'Suits me,' Mac said. Then she faked Frannie's british accent. 'We'll kill two birds with one stone.'

Mac made a sharp right turn into Derry town center.

'I don't think it's going to be that easy,' Frannie closed the journal. She'd been reading about Pennywise a great deal, from the initial garbled and panicked news reports at the very beginning of mankind's discovery of monsters, to studies conducted later on DNA and ectoplasm left on his victims. He was the worst of the worst.

'A Freak is a Freak,' Mac said darkly. 'Pretty sure he'll die like all the rest.'

Mac's sentiment rankled, but they'd had this argument before. Frannie saw the men and women they used to be. Mackenzie just saw the monsters.

Cargo snapped loose in the Volkswagon, thumping the interior wall. Frannie jumped hard, the skin at the nape of her neck gone cold. Mac grinned at her.

'Scared of clowns?'

'No.'

Sometimes Frannie wondered if Mac was scared of anything. Then she wondered if it would do her GOOD to be. Derry's library sailed past and Frannie felt a pang of longing. If only she was spending her weekend in there instead. Derry wasn't as big as Frannie had

imagined. Only two minutes out of the town center, Mac finally let up on the gas and rolled to a stop overlooking the infamous Barrens. Mac slammed the van door so hard Frannie had to quell the urge to jump. They stood side by side in the early afternoon haze. The air was bronze with heat. Dry red dirt stained Frannie's pristine trainers already. It was going to be a beautiful afternoon. It was a shame they'd be spending most of it underground.

'Isn't this where they found the kids bodies?'

Frannie nodded. The evidence always washed up eventually. Families were finally allowed to grieve and bury the dead. Frannie wasn't sure how much comfort a bloated, decomposing carcass could offer a grieving mother.

'What did we ever do to deserve being sent out here to the asshole of the world?' Mac asked, squinting at the sun.

'You keep bringing the monsters in dead.'

Mac smiled. 'The best Freak is a dead Freak.'

'Sobourne likes to question them.'

'Well, if she wants to question them so bad, let her get her pristine, silk panties down here and do the dirty work herself.'

Mac dug in the trunk, pulling out two backpacks, satellite phone, bottled water and rigs. Frannie slid into hers and put her denim on top.

'This should give the clown something to write home about,' Mac said, stroking the modified 9mm that fired white phosphor. Mac pulled out a handheld computer. It was loaded with drone scans of the sewers.

'This way.'

It was further into the Barrens than Frannie expected. Half a mile cross country, traversing tributary streams where Frannie could swear she saw water run backwards, they slid through a thick wall of foliage, nearly colliding with a small flock of sheep and their lambs.

Frannie paused at the bottom of a steep bank to take the cap off her water and drink.

Sweat soaked her back. Mac pointed exuberantly at their destination, an open pipe that was overflow and part of the old sewage system.

'There it is,' she sounded pleased.

'You really love your job, don't you?'

'Sure,' Mac agreed, missing the point entirely.

'I need a new one,' Frannie said quietly, following Mac through the low, clear stream.

Frannie wrinkled her nose in disgust. Pulling waders from her pack, she gazed into the awful, aching darkness with her heart like a tight knot in her throat. She didn't want to go down there.

'Told you not to wear the white shoes,' Mac smirked.

'At least I can throw my shoes away. I can't throw my FEET away.'

'Ask the clown to bite them off for you, then you can.'

'God, you're so funny.'

'Thanks,' Mac gestured. 'Ladies first.'

Frannie approached the outlet pipe, feeling nauseous.

*It's just a demon clown, she thought. We've hunted worse.*

It wasn't the 19th century. They had guns and bombs and knowledge and **technology**. Monsters couldn't hide in the shadows from science anymore. They were a proven fact that had to be controlled, and that was where this two-woman team came in.

*Humans have the upper hand now, Frannie tried to comfort herself. I am a powerful woman. I am powerful.*

'You're a lady too, you know,' she sounded anxious.

'Only just,' Mackenzie laughed, blocking the in-flowing light and making the sewer seem that much darker.

An itch of panic took up residence in Frannie's solar plexus. She sucked in a deep breath and nearly heaved from the smell.

'OK,' she hit the flashlight switch, tracking the beam left and right.

*Let IT be asleep, she prayed. I just want to get this over with.*

'I got your back,' Mackenzie said quietly. Frannie felt some of the feeling return to her fingers.

Ten feet from the broken pipe entrance, light shied away from the dark as if it was afraid to be here. Frannie trod carefully, avoiding the clumps, worried about breaking an ankle. The smell clung to the back of her throat with pigeon claws, making her want to retch.

'We should've bought masks,' she whispered.

*PLINK*

Frannie spun, gun and flashlight primed on the spot but it was just a leak coming from the cracked sewer pipe ceiling. A single droplet shone with a strange effervescence that reminded her of fuel mixed with water and fell into the ankle-deep sewage runs.

*PLINK*

Frannie was sweating under her nylon polyester gym top. The skin on her shoulder blades prickled an atavistic warning. She swallowed hard like she was trying to down a lump of feathers.

'More like bio-containment,' Mac said, lifting her foot to reveal a turd the size of a kitten.

'Jesus,' Frannie covered her nose as Mac tried to dislodge it on the bricks.

Strange, eerie knocks and bumps echoed up from the stinking depths, making her imagine that foul, experimental sewer life had taken hold here. Perhaps it had. Frannie's flashlight beam illuminated stagnant

water that looked as green as it smelled. A tunnel intersection opened without warning, offering them a choice. Left, intermittent slimy grilles set the ceiling let in a sparse sprinkle of natural light. To the right it was darker than the pit before creation.

'This way,' Mac's voice echoed, making Frannie tense. 'There's an access ladder down here.'

'Deeper?' Frannie asked nervously.

'Do you want me to take point?'

'I'm fine,' Frannie lied.

The ladder was coated in fine, blood-colored rust and very unstable. Frannie tried not to look at the bolts as they wiggled with her descent like bugs in a hole. Concrete dust billowed into her face. She choked on it. A crushing belt seemed to tighten around her ribs. It felt how she'd always imagined drowning might feel.

She hit the concrete on her heels, sending a shock of pain through her lower back. She looked up. The dripping skylights tangled in old plastic and weeds were so very far away. Uneasy, Frannie scanned the tunnel mouths. Mac landed next to her.

*SCRITCH*

Frannie spun, light trained on the rat that scurried by, its tail dragging in shit.

'Jesus Christ,' she hissed, trying to breathe through her anxiety and the cloying sewer stench.

The density of shadow changed in the tunnel closest. Something was sneaking around and watching them. Mac fired the phosphor gun, making Frannie's ears ring. The bolt lodged in the tunnel wall and burned like a perpetual firework, casting grotesque, dancing shadows through their legs.

'He's awake!' Mackenzie took off, splashing through the waste water, light fading around the bend like a flare fades at sea.

Frannie froze, paralyzed with atavistic fear of the dark. Breath ragged, her skin covered in a rash of goosebumps. A painful flood of adrenaline made every muscle ache with the need to run. Marooned in this tiny bubble of torch light, Frannie heard a *PLINK* behind her. She sucked in a breath of warm, fetid underground air and turned, freezing fingers fumbling with her gun. There was nothing there.

'Get it together,' Frannie whispered at herself.

She tried walking calmly. Biofeedback would help chill her out primal brain. As she dove into the narrow black mouth of a tunnel, her flashlight dimmed as though it was losing its eternal battle with the dark. Frannie went faster and faster until she was running, heart thumping like a caged bird staring down the business end of a blow torch. She splashed through sudden, freezing, fast-flowing water that smelled clean and staggered into an open chamber, her boots *CRUNCHING* on little stones. She looked down.

'Mac,' her whisper was sandpaper dry. 'Mac!?'

The floor was strewn with finger bones. Ribs. Broken skulls. A flicker of light danced in the tunnel ahead. Frannie pursued it until her lungs burned and her throat ached. Eyes stinging with frightened tears she spun on the spot in an intersection of four pipes, the echoes of her own panicked breaths turning every liquid shadow into Pennywise. Something barreled into her and Frannie screamed high and shrill like a child.

'Frannie! I lost him but I think he went that way.'

'Stay with me,' Frannie was angry. 'Don't you run off like that!'

Mac's surprise compounded Frannie's hot, prickly shame.

'Fine. Come on, then. Honestly, I've seen you kill a vampire at point blank...how come this guy scares you so much?'

'It's a feeling,' unconsciously she touched the silver rosary that hung around her neck. Goosebumps prickled on her arms. 'I keep having these dreams. Dreams where I'm damned.'

This time Mac stuck so close that Frannie could hear her breathing.



The claustrophobic tunnels gave way abruptly to an open cavern that smelled of rot and stagnant water. Fresh air sank from the overhead grille. Frannie felt her throat relax. Light at last! Shafts of it fell on the ghoulish display of trophies piled fifty feet high. Only four carcasses floated about IT's pile of collectables and they were dry and brittle, just bones and old cloth.

*He's starving, she thought. Just like we thought. The War did more than reduce the population. It reduced **fear**.*

Frannie jumped hard. A pale, skinny bone-man moved in the dark, the edge of its silver satin costume catching the light. It jingled. Frannie's skin flushed with a new rash of fevered goosebumps, a knot of fear churning in her belly.

'Pennywise,' Mac said, loudly and clearly, clicking her phosphor gun out of its holster and leveling it at the skinny shape who seemed disinclined to fight head on. 'Pennywise the Dancing Clown. You need to come with us.'

'Get OUT of my house,' he hissed, voice bearing down from every direction like the force of gravity. Frannie's insides twisted in fear.

'You're under arrest.'

Laughter, dark, slow, ending in a childlike giggle that set Frannies nerves on edge and made her want to vomit.

**CRUNCH.** Mac's gun hit the floor and skidded into filthy water. Mac screamed, her broken arm hanging swinging like a pendulum. Mac's eyes were more white than brown, the noises that tore from her throat stank of strangled pain and fear.

Orange hair surged at them, shrieking like a dying rabbit, two clawed hands outstretched. Frannie screamed. Mac yelled in pain as he cut three deep gashes through the meat of her breast, staggering into Frannie, who felt a hand slide into her jacket. It closed around her gun. Mac twisted and Pennywise froze, the barrel in his eye.

Frannie seized up like a moth before the furnace, paralyzed with crippling fear of the glowing orange eyes that rotated to skin her

alive with his mind. Her heart jolted. Suffocating under the immense weight of his undivided attention, Frannie fluttered, pinned by the raw animal power he exuded. Drool dripped from his bottom lip, his claws twitched. One eye wandered lazily off to the left.

'Die, bitch,' Mac pulled the trigger. Frannie yelled, her ears ringing.

The clown's skull was shattered, pieces of too-white bone crunched underfoot as Frannie took her gun back and pulled Mac away from the body. She sat the taller woman down and pulled a recombination cylinder out of her pack. It was only the size of a bulky ink pen but its white laser beam pulled the bone back into place painlessly and fused the skin and muscle together over her ribs.

'That was pretty impressive,' Frannie admitted. 'You shot him left handed.'

'Like I said,' colour was slowly returning to Mac's face. 'He's just another Freak.'

Frannie slid the cylinder into her pocket. Mac flexed her hand. She used it to push her dampened afro off her face.

'Frannie? Where did he go?'

'To Hell,' said a soft voice, concealed in shadow behind the trophy stack. 'And back. Which is where you'll go. You think you can kill me with a gun?'

'Shit,' Frannie squeaked, as Pennywise staggered into view. His skull was blown open. He was holding the bone. He pushed it back into place with a grotesque *squelch*. His sharp buck teeth showed behind his smirk and drool dripped from his bottom lip.

'So hungry,' he slathered, eyes flaring red. 'Let's play a game. This is how it goes. I'll kill one of you while the other runs,' he smiled widely, his glowing eyes flicking up to Frannie's face. Her heart stopped, trapped in her throat. She KNEW it would be her. The idea filled her with liquid nitrogen dread. 'You won't run fast enough, *Frannie*, but you can try.'

He surged so fast Frannie staggered back screaming. He reached her

with inhuman speed, fingernails sharp on her sensitive throat. Frannie gasped, afraid to breathe as instant, starving need to escape flooded her like a paralyzing electric shock. She twitched, trying to make her body move to escape the agony of his death-stare. His nostrils flared as he SNIFFED deeply. Sweat broke out all over. Tears gathered in her eyes. Then agitated, he gagged and dropped her.

'Not tasty,' he whined. 'Not tasty at all!'

Frannie stumbled upright, shaking. Even half starved he was stronger than an angry stallion. The rope in her pack wouldn't be enough. Mac had the carbon fiber cuffs but Frannie KNEW. She felt an intuitive, terrible understanding in that moment. Nothing could hold him. Neither one of them would walk out of here alive.

'What about you, girly!' Pennywise surged towards Mac, grabbing her face with both gloved hands. She screamed, jolting back until his strange power froze her in place. His claws drew drops of blood on her face as she fought his superhuman strength and failed. He sniffed deeply, then shuddered, gagging and shoved her away.

'What's wrong with you?!' his voice echoed in the chamber, making Frannie jump.

*We're wearing synthetic pheromones that make us smell disgusting,* Frannie thought.

Mac smirked at him. 'Wouldn't you like to know. How about we play a game? Only this time, *I'm* making the rules. You run. *We* chase.'

His face morphed into grotesque rage as he screamed in frustration, spittle flying, hovering behind a seven foot pile of shoes like they were a shield.

'I was expecting a real monster,' Mac said, disgusted. 'All I see is a weak, skinny little shit.'

'Never weak!' he hissed, surging towards them. Frannie scrambled back, kicking up stones and water with her heels as Mac threw her weight on his back, grabbing him in a headlock. He screeched, writhing, eyes gone crimson, shark teeth protruding. Mac kicked out

one of his knees viciously. He wobbled but didn't go down.

'HELP ME!' she yelled at Frannie angrily. 'Don't just *sit* there!'

Frannie dragged the rope from her pack and stomach rolling at the prospect of getting close enough to restrain him, she dived for his hands.

---

**More to come!**

## 2. Chapter 2

### Chapter 2.

Frannie ached from wrestling Pennywise into the rope and cuffs, then into the detention halo. The halo's frequency should have knocked him out cold but so far, he was still watching them menacingly. He looked subdued kneeling and bound on the concrete, which Frannie knew from recent, direct contact with her knees and butt was damp as *well* as cold.

Mac produced a thick syringe and held it up to the light. It glistened like petrol. *Potassium Chloride* with a side order of *Pancuronium Bromide*. Frannie recognised the skull and crossbones label.

'Will this work?' Mac asked.

'I suppose,' Frannie hedged. She had no idea The lethal cocktail was usually enough to put a werewolf down but if Pennywise could stay awake in a detention halo, maybe he could survive more than your average werewolf?

Mac stabbed it violently into his neck and pressed the plunger. Pennywise howled and hissed, his throat working furiously under the halo. Then he collapsed, groaning.

'Nighty night, bitch,' Mac booted him roughly onto his side. Pennywise closed his furnace eyes, but kept breathing.

An hour later, he still tracked them with bloodshot blue eyes, his breathing ragged. He was working at the manacles with his claws. Mac kicked him in the gut for it.

'BAD dog!' she sneered. 'How the *hell* is he still alive?'

'I have no idea,' Frannie said honestly.

'You can't kill me,' Pennywise's breathless chuckle put Frannie's nerves on edge. 'I'm eternal. I will live forever.'

Mac bent to look him in the eye.

'You wanna bet on that?'

Pennywise scowled.

Frannie plucked a water-marked photo album off Pennywise's pile of trophies and opened it. A short, skinny blonde girl posed on the tree-line of a verdant forest with a bald, moustached man who must have been her Grandfather. They were both laughing and holding plastic trophies. Frannie turned the page. There was a home-made birthday cake with twelve white candles and a golden retriever puppy wearing a huge red bow. Then a child's funeral. The coffin was empty.

'Found anything?' Mac called.

'No,' Frannie put the album down. *Just another broken family.*

A glint caught her eye. Frannie toed aside a torn and stained pair of boys slacks. Her fingertips found the cold, engraved surface of a silver locket.

'Get away from that!' Pennywise screamed, making Frannie jump.

He writhed and howled, trying to break the manacles. Frannie held her find up to the light. Inside the locket, a pretty, dark-haired woman with Spanish eyes sat in front of a circus wagon. The name "Penrose" was emblazoned brightly on the side. Identical twin boys posed next to her.

'I'll eat your heart while it's still beating!' Pennywise shrieked.

Frannie examined their faces. Had Pennywise killed them too? Had she *known* he would? Was that the reason for her thousand yard stare?

'What's this?' she demanded, dangling it in front of him. He gnashed and growled, his eyes furnace red. Frannie held her ground even though her guts churned with fear.

'Your death!' He promised.

'OK,' she gathered up the chain. 'I guess I'll just flush it into the sewers then.'

'NO!' he screamed, panting as he tried to break his restraints. 'You can't hold me! It's only a matter of time before you float too!'

'You're starving and weak,' Mac sneered. 'What's the matter, freak? Aren't kids afraid of you any more?'

Pennywise smiled. 'They're so sweet, so tasty. When they're afraid.'

Mac covered his face with her hand and shoved him away.

'You're nothing next to rape, or being trafficked, losing everyone,' she sounded bitter. Frannie knew she'd lost her whole family in the Third World War. It had changed everyone. Kids were tougher.

'Not so scary,' he agreed quietly. 'But *you're* afraid of me,' he looked at Frannie like he wanted to read her soul. Frannie wished she could cover herself in lead.

Mac dragged a chipped baseball bat from the trophy pile.

'Well,' she announced. 'None of this junk tells us how to kill you so I guess we'll have to do it the old fashioned way.'

'It has to be humane.'

'Does **he** look fucking *humane* to you?'

Frannie swallowed a sour, sticky ball of spit. She didn't like the way Mac was looking at her. A memory dragged her down. She was nine, camping with her Gran and Grandad when they found a fox screaming, its leg in a poachers trap. Its eyes had rolled back, leg denuded to the bone and splintered where it had started chewing in its desperation. Mac's eyes were the same. Frannie realised she wasn't the only one afraid of this thing. She just had a different way of showing it.

'Noones going to know,' Mac said, her eyes reflecting surface light from the grille, making her look possessed. 'Unless YOU tell them.'

Frannie's mouth went dry. The bat pointed at her heart felt like a threat. Pennywise's weighty attention tracked between the women. Suddenly Frannie was back in her pink unicorn bedroom at home,

eight years old with her Dad, slobbering drunk, bearing down on her and her Mum crying on the stairs.

'I'm not going to tell anyone,' she said submissively.

Mac's headlamp gaze moved away, allowing Frannie to breathe again.

'Payback time, bitch,' Mac grunted as she brought the bat down hard on his shins. It made a gruesome CRACK. Frannie clenched her fists, the locket digging painfully into her palm. In the static anxiety of her mind-scape, one thought crystallised over all the rest. *Who's the real monster?*

'You can't kill me!' he hissed. 'You're WEAK and SOFT. I'm eternal. The *destroyer of worlds!*'

Mac punched him hard in the mouth.

'If you don't shut up I'll feed you my boot next.'

'Why don't you just use dynamite?' Frannie hoped Mac would take the hint and just kill him fast. She didn't like Mac's tendency to sadism.

'This is more fun,' Mac said.

Frannie hadn't expected Pennywise to bleed but his blood floated UP from his injuries, decomposing before their eyes. Frannie stared at her shoes until the noises of torture stopped and Mac dropped the bat with a hollow, wooden THWACK and clawed damp hair from her eyes.

Pennywise lay contorted like an abandoned marionette. Three of his gloved fingers were broken, his face lax, eyes glazed.

'Jesus,' Mac panted. 'This fucker just wont *die.*'

Pennywise's blue eyes rotated to focus on the locket dangling from Frannie's hand.

'Dynamite it is,' Mac declared. Then; 'Shit! I think I left it in the van.'



'I'll watch him,' Frannie said.

Mac's footsteps faded into the tunnels and Frannie clutched her silver rosary. She gathered her courage and approached Pennywise, swinging the locket between her fingers. He tracked it, lips dripping blood and spit.

'What is this to you?' she asked. He didn't answer. 'I might take it home with me then. It's got to be worth a few quid. Maybe I'll sell it on eBay.'

She dropped it into her jacket pocket.

'NO!' he cried, his eyes flaring, breaths ragged with pain and frustration.

'Or, I could give it back to you. If you tell me what it is.'

'What do you care?' he snarled.

'Knowing one monster helps me kill the next,' she shrugged.

'You're a LIAR,' he growled. 'Your heart is SOFT and STUPID as porridge! You want to HELP THEM. You think if you dig deep enough in Ol' Pennywise, you can snatch those kids back from Hell, WHERE I PUT THEM!'

Frannie jumped. The echoes died.

'You like to think you're not too late. But you are. I killed them and *feasted* on their flesh and fear. They cried, you know. But you weren't here. You failed. I'm going to kill you too. But not to eat.'

Frannie seized the locket to hurl it deep into the cavern, furious with his intellectual assessment of her. Then she thought better of it.

'I want to help you. Tell me how to kill you and I can make it fast.'

'Nope!' he cackled. 'Nope. Not telling!'

She tossed him the locket. Pennywise lunged, desperate in his relief, gathering it into his mouth. The chain dangled from the corner of his

painted smile. His fiery eyes died to blue. Frannie crouched.

'Who were they?'

He scowled.

'When you die, the knowledge dies too. I *promise* you will.'

'Were they your family?'

'One family,' he agreed, suddenly seeming smaller and more vulnerable.

'What happened to them?'

'You. First,' he said darkly.

Frannie wiped her nervous hands on her jeans. Was it worth it? What if Penrose WAS still in there? Then she had a duty of care, didn't she?

'Dad was a marine. Mum stayed at home. Dad was hardly ever around.'

'Mmm,' Pennywise hummed. 'Not good enough, Frannie. You left out the best bits! Can you still feel his breath on your face? And the stinging he left between your legs?'

Frannie straightened, dizzy, hands trembling. She fought the urge to put space between them.

'Yes,' she choked out. 'Your turn.'

'You want to know what happened. I HAPPENED,' pain burned through his eyes. 'They were dead when I went home. Dead and gone, like you'll be soon enough.'

'Was she your wife?'

'Yes,' he growled. 'You think I killed them. I didn't.'

'Then who did?'

Pennywise's face twisted in emotional agony that scared her more

than his rage.

'*She* did,' Frannie realized aloud. 'When she found out what you are.'

His quick breaths and fiery eyes betrayed his pain.

'Leave me be!' he snarled. 'I'm tired of your games.'

'Tell me how to end it.'

'You can't,' he said quietly. 'I will live forever.'

'I doubt that,' Mackenzie was standing behind them. 'Not once I'm done with you.'

Frannie swallowed hard. Mac had the dynamite.

'He might be useful in finding the other bodies. We should take him back to base.'

'You want to explain to Sobourne why you disobeyed orders?'

Frannie pinched the bridge of her nose, exhaling slowly. Penrose was still in there, his reaction to the locket proved that. But what could she do? Their orders were clear. Duty of care was really just a technicality to protect those who spent more than fifty percent of their time human.

'Fine,' Frannie said quietly.

Mac strapped the charge to Pennywise's skinny torso and set it for five seconds. Frannie wondered if he was afraid. They grabbed their backpacks and headed for the concrete bulkhead they were using for cover. Frannie took one last look. She was sure Penrose was still at least partially in control. Now she'd never know for sure. She took cover. Her last thought before the *big bang* was; if Pennywise kills for pleasure, why didn't he kill us in the tunnels?

Concrete dust and brick hail rained down. Frannie waited for the echoes to subside before she pulled off her ear defenders. As the ringing in her skull dulled, she became aware that something was beeping. She dug through her bag and found the satellite phone. She

touched the screen and it came to life. There was a text.

**!MISSION UPDATE!**

**RETRIEVE ENTITY KNOW AS "PENNYWISE"**

**DO NOT EXORCISE**

**DO NOT DESTROY**

**ALL OTHER PRIORITIES VOID**

**PREPARED FOR EXTRACTION ETA 06:00**

'Oh *shit*,' Frannie stood up. She handed the phone over. 'We're both going to get the sack.'

'Fucking hell!' Mac cursed. 'Why can't they stop changing their fucking minds!'

The slow convection of cool air from the overhead grille began to clear the airborne dust. Frannie stepped into the rain. The explosion had torn an eight foot hole in the overhead grille. She could see the sun. Frannie wished she was up there now with a picnic basket and a bottle of raspberry Prosecco.

She gazed at the spot where he'd vaporised. This was her first real job after leaving Brighton. The first job that paid enough for her to rent her own flat. Now it was all going to come crashing down. Then, to her surprise, something bloody and charred peeled away from the wall with a painful wail.

It collapsed, too-white ribs sticking out. Frannie retched in horror as all around, pieces of frayed flesh sublimated off the walls and ceiling. His corpse danced like he was in the electric chair, joints popping, spine snapping. Pennywise came together, his last missing eye skittering over the dusty floor to magnetise to his skull. Frannie threw up. Pennywise collapsed with a groan.

Mac leaned in carefully to check for a pulse, then snatched her hand back. She toed him onto his belly. Frannie's heart leapt. The cuffs were blown apart. One good tug and he'd be free. There was a hole in

his flank the size of a fist.

He sputtered to life, bringing up spit, dust and bile. He groaned like a lion calling through the morning fog.

'No more!' he wailed. 'You two are the Devil! The end of me!'

'Not any more,' Mac sounded very disappointed. 'Our boss needs you alive. Don't get too happy about it though. She's way worse than we are.'

Pennywise howled pain and frustration into the floor.

'One minute you want me dead, the next, you want me to live! You're insane! You're crazy! Crazy people, nut house fools!'

'Believe me,' Mac said darkly. 'I want you dead.'

Frannie didn't miss how his eyes filled with hate.

'Let me out of these,' he jangled the cuffs.

Mackenzie snorted.

'It *hurts*,' he whined. 'We could make a deal. How about...I only kill *one* of you?' he suggested eagerly. 'Only *one*! A little deal with Ol' Pennywise. I'm a man of my word.'

'Forget it, Freak.'

'Need to EEAATT!' he howled, twisting his head unnaturally to look at his open belly. His eyes went wide like a child's. 'You've given me a big hole! You've blown me apart! MURDER!' he screeched. 'Need to eat...' he whimpered pathetically. 'So hungry, so weak. Need to eat or I'll die!'

---

**More to come!**

### 3. Chapter 3

#### Chapter 3

Frannie wasn't as good at saving the monsters as she was at killing them. Her first aid training kicked in though and she assessed his injury. It was a grim prognosis. Mac hovered over them like a slaughterhouse ghoul.

'Will he live?'

'I don't think so,' Frannie said.

'Use the recombination cylinder,' Mac suggested grudgingly.

'It's calibrated for human tissue. We don't know what it'll do to him.'

'It's better than nothing.'

'Just-' Pennywise coughed up dust. 'Need...to...eat.'

Frannie stood, scraping her hair back.

'What choice do we have?'

Mac's fingers were pincer-tight on Frannie's arm.

'Are you insane!? You can't fucking *feed* him!'

'Sobourne wants him *alive*. He's not going to last the night, Mac. His kidney is GONE.'

'Then just let him die!' Mac threw her hands up. 'They won't know!'

Frannie lost a little more patience with Mac. The buzz of a Brotherhood drone passed overhead, casting a broad-winged shadow through the hole they'd blasted in the iron grille.

'No longer an option!' Frannie said triumphantly. 'I'm not saying we feed him a *person*. We just get him a meal so he can regenerate.'

Frannie looked at Pennywise. He was listening intently.

'What about lamb?' she suggested.

'Sheep?' He perked up.

'Yeah. Not your usual fare but, it's meat, right?'

'Yes!' he agreed. 'Yes, yes. Just this once. Just a little snack. Tasty, tasty blood and flesh. Yes, bring it to Ol' Pennywise! I could be your genie, Frannie. Bring me something to eat and I'll show you how good I am to my friends!'

Mac stopped Frannie as she took aim at the grille with the grappling gun.

'What if he regains all his strength?'

'What if we do nothing?' Frannie countered.

'FUCK,' Mac cursed, releasing her. *'Fine.'*

Frannie aimed at the broken grille and fired. The grappling hook shot straight up, dragging its lightweight steel cable behind it. The hook deployed, lodging perfectly. Frannie tested the cable with a hard tug, then she threaded the terminated end through her rig and buckled up. She hit the button on her belt. A perpetual energy motor *whirred*, lifting her smoothly towards the sun.

Emerging into fresh air, Frannie took a deep breath to dislodge the cobwebs that had taken hold of her mind. Maybe she should just get in the VW and drive away? Drive until she couldn't stay awake anymore and Derry was far behind her.

*Mac has the keys*, she realised.

Instead, Frannie slid down the grassy embankment towards the sheep grazing by the trees. Crouching, she clicked her gun free of her rig. The grass was dry and prickly on her knees, distracting like the sweat that rolled down her back and the heat-haze that wavered between her and her quarry. She wiped sweat and damp blonde hair out of her eyes and picked a ewe without lambs.

**BANG!**

The sheep scattered. Frannie jogged to the kill, feeling guilty. It was still alive. The bullet had gone wide of its skull and lodged in its neck. It was paralyzed. Its eyes rolled back, showing white. Frannie took hold of its back legs and dragged it.

'I'm sorry,' she said, as she rolled it onto the grille and pushed it through the hole. It fell a hundred feet and landed with a disgusting *CRACK*.

Frannie followed it down. At the bottom of IT's trophy pile, she found it, skull cracked. She dragged it, sweating and fatigued over to where Pennywise strained against his chain. He fell on it, his protruding shark teeth ripping grapefruit-sized chunks of flesh away effortlessly. Frannie turned away from the grotesque spectacle.

'Bon appetit, I guess.'

'Look!' Mac pointed, a while later. Frannie did and instantly regretted it. Pennywise tore the ewe's head free and popped it into his mouth whole.

*CRUNCH*.

Frannie swallowed reflexively, feeling nauseous. Mac pointed to his injury. Sure enough, the hole had begun to close and a new kidney was growing.

'Pennywise,' Frannie approached cautiously, trying to blur her eyes to the savage reality of his meal. 'Tell me what you are. Once my superiors get here, I can't protect you unless I know.'

He looked wary, vulnerable and childlike despite the fact that his costume was covered in blood.

'Why would you protect *me*?'

'Duty of care. Any entity of human intelligence and emotional complexity that demonstrates the ability to suffer is entitled to the rights of a non-human Sentient. *Including* monsters.'

Pennywise's blue gaze traveled to Mac, who now sat propped up on her backpack, playing with her smart-phone.



'She wants me dead. Why don't you?'

'I believe in second chances.'

'That'll be the death of you.'

Frannie edged closer.

'Do you want to sit up?' she offered. He nodded.

'That deal you mentioned,' she said nervously. 'How about we make one now? You don't rip my arms off and I won't shoot you in the face.'

He grinned, buck teeth pink with blood and glistening wet. Then he nodded. Frannie wiped nervous hands on her jeans. Would kindness work? She had no idea, but it was obvious Mac's gung-ho approach wasn't getting them anywhere.

'You're uncommonly kind,' he sounded serious.

'Thank you.'

'That'll get you killed too. Frannie. I've got a better deal for you. An even better one! I'll leave Derry and you, and that *monster*,' he glared at Mac. 'Alone! You can live your lives until the dirt takes you. If you let me go. I want to live.'

Frannie leaned in. *Finally*, she thought. *We're communicating*.

'I want to help you live, but we have to protect innocent people from you too. That's why we're here.'

He pouted, thinking.

'I'll only eat the bad ones!' he bounced. 'Bad, bad people who already deserve it!'

Frannie smiled at him.

'Let me out,' he jangled the cuffs. 'I won't hurt you. I promise. Cross my heart! You brought me a meal. We're friends now.'

'I can't.'

'Do it,' he snapped off the last word, eyes flaring yellow.

'Mac has the keys.'

'I'll tell you my secret,' he said persuasively. 'Come closer. I'll whisper it to you. It's just between us. No-one else gets to hear it.'

Slowly, warily, Frannie leaned in until she smelled his skin. Old blood, dusty satin and aged paper. She shuddered.

'Clossssser,' he hissed, body tensing as he raised himself up on his knees to reach her ear. Frannie glanced down. His rubber legs held strong in an impossible position. She swallowed a hard lump of nervous spit, expecting him to lunge and bite. He didn't. Her heart pounded wildly as he swayed closer, his hot breath stirring the baby-fine hairs behind her ear.

Suddenly she could smell the circus. Candy floss, popcorn and face-paint. That threatened to transport her back to her childhood, before the war, but she fought it. She knew she wasn't safe enough for that, as much as she wanted to remember brighter days.

'Once there was a man called Penrose, who joined the circus! William. Penrose. Who married Violet. Lovely Violet. He was so happy, until the winter of 1849. You see, there was a very bad storm that year. The wind blew so hard, it blew the whole circus away!'

Frannie shivered, her heart in her throat as his voice spun pictures in her head.

'They were starving,' his voice dropped, threatening. 'So much PAIN. So much SUFFERING. Then the hunchback came knocking,' his voice filled with hate. Frannie battled the urge to wrench away.

'He asked for bread, but of course, Penrose had nothing to give him! Penrose let him sit by the fire and sold his soul for bread. And IT took him.'

Frannie hid her shaking hands in her armpits.

'His family ate and ate! Oh, how they *feasted*! They never went hungry again. But he did. HE did. Nothing could slake his hunger save for fresh, living FEAR!'

Frannie gave an involuntary shudder, her guts squirming with the urge to get away, but she couldn't move. Pennywise's burning cheek touched her temple. How had he managed to stand with his hands tied? Frannie looked *up*, paralyzed with fear.

He was so tall, somehow BIGGER after his meal. Her mouth went dry. Atmosphere gathered around him like it gathers around a malicious planet, rolling off his broad shoulders to chill the air. Frannie felt sick.

'He killed, and he feasted,' Pennywise whispered, his tone switching to fury so fast Frannie made a noise of terror. 'AND VIOLET FOUND HIM! And she DISOWNED ME!'

*Please, stop*, she wanted to sob. He wasn't holding her in place, he couldn't, but she felt like he was.

'He came home and his boys were dead! She burned them alive in the fireplace, then hanged herself on the stairs!' he spat, his saliva hitting her face. Frannie trembled all over. He straightened.

'I am Penrose and Pennywise, Mr Bob Gray and The Destroyer. DEVOURER of WORLDS. Eater of children. I feed on *fear*. I gorge, I rest, and gorge again. Until now I've hunted alone.'

'I-I didn't hunt with you,' Frannie stammered. 'I just bought you a sheep.'

'But you felt sorry for me!' he crowed, his yellow eyes intense on her face. 'For ME! For OI' Pennywise. I never had a friend.'

'What're you saying to her!' Mac kicked Pennywise away from Frannie. He growled, eyes flaring red.

'It's OK,' Frannie said quickly, spell broken. 'I'm fine,' she lied. Her hands still shook but she hid them in her jacket. 'Let's get some heat going. It's going to be a long night.'

Mac glowered at Pennywise suspiciously.

'I'll take first watch,' she said, settling onto her haunches, her bat on her lap.

'Fine,' Frannie agreed.

Frannie tore open a ration pack, tossing one to Mac. The moon came up fast, nearly full. In its cool silver light, Frannie could see Mac's outline. She hadn't moved from her spot or taken her eyes off the clown. Frannie finally shut her eyes and slept fitfully under a foil blanket, tossing and turning to every *drip* and *creak* of the sewers.

Frannie sensed she was dreaming. There was blood, bone and sewage stink and the aching dark of the pipes. She was colder than she could ever remember being in her life. Then the temperature changed and she finally slept. She woke to the beep of her wristwatch to relieve Mac, feeling warm and comfortable. Something was wrapped around her, a limb heavy on her waist. She twisted to look. Pennywise was resting but not asleep.

'Wha-!?' Frannie yelped, scrambling away.. 'What're you doing!' she squeaked in horror.

He'd broken the cuffs. The remains hung from his wrists, colliding noisily with his little bells.

'Keeping you warm.'

'W-Why!?' Frannie squeaked, horrified at his proximity.

He didn't answer.

'Where's – Where's Mackenzie?'

Again, no answer.

Frannie saw the blood before the body. Shaking violently, she stood slowly. Then she screamed, covering her mouth with her hands. Mac was dead, ripped open from throat to groin and spilled out all over the floor.

'**NO!**' Frannie howled.

Bloated loops of Mac's large bowel had leeches vein patterns into her skirt. Her lungs were missing and her heart was stuffed into her mouth.

'No, no, NO!' Frannie bent double, heaving watery stomach acid. Her legs folded, knees smacking the stone.

Pennywise laughed. He cartwheeled past Frannie to land on Mac's broken corpse, making Frannie jump violently. He stood weightless on her open belly, eyes glowing yellow, *smiling*. Frannie sucked in a sparse breath. She was going to *die*. Something wet and warm hit her skin. She looked up. It was raining blood. Pennywise danced in it, his bells jingling as his costume turned red. He stared at her with hot coal eyes, his intensity forcing all the air out of her. Frannie sobbed brokenly. Then the vision broke like the seventh wave and a dry cotton fingertip touched her nape.

'Don't touch me!' Frannie screamed, kicking up dirt to get away from him. 'I shouldn't have slept! I should have-' she stopped.

Pennywise lifted his silk costume. His thin torso was the same color as his painted face. His belly and ribs bore seven bone-deep phosphor bullet holes, already healing. Frannie kicked the phosphor gun away from Mac's limp hand and heaving on the stench of open bowels, checked the cartridge. It was empty. Suddenly Frannie wasn't afraid. She was *angry*.

'What did you do to her!' Frannie shoved him hard. 'WHY!' she screamed.

'I WANT TO LIVE!' he roared back, eyes flaring.

A ragged sob tore up her throat.

'You attacked her and she shot you in self defense!' Frannie lied to herself aloud.

'That's a LIE!' he hissed, bending to look Frannie in the eye. 'A dirty, filthy LIE, LIE, LIE!'

Frannie's eyes filled with stinging tears.

'We should have sent you back to Hell!' she cried, tearing at her own hair in helpless frustration.

'Kill Penrose and I will devour EVERYTHING and EVERYONE you love!' he surged towards her.

Frannie scratched and slapped at him until he caught her hands. She sobbed until she ran out of air.

'He's the ONLY part of you worth knowing!' her spittle hit his cheek. 'You're disgusting! You hear me!?'

Enraged, his claws broke through his cotton gloves. He was hurting her. Frannie wrenched out of his grasp, tugging the silver rosary from her neck. She grabbed his head with inhuman strength borne of fear and pressed the rosary into his skin. He *shrieked*.

'In nomine patris, et filii, et spiritus sancti!' she hissed. 'In Jesus' name I command you to reveal your true name!'

Pennywise screeched, his face splitting wide to reveal concentric rows of dead teeth. He was too strong but Frannie held on.

'Lord, see this man, your servant, and liberate him body and soul from this occupation!' she cried, every muscle and tendon burning with pain as she held him down. He clawed at her chest.

*Go ahead*, she thought, deep serenity descending. *Kill me. I'll take you with me.*

'In nomine patris,' she breathed. The crucifix smoked. 'Et filii, et spiritus sancti. In Jesus' name, I command you to reveal your true name.'

IT spoke, gravelly voice resounding through the sewers with a belch of fire that singed the back of her neck. '**NEVER!**' IT roared.

Frannie pressed the cross in harder, her nostrils flared wide, her lungs burning with exertion. Frannie couldn't remember ever being this strong. Maybe it had come from God, maybe from hate. Pennywise

writhed in pain then roared with anger. Spiders surged out of the drains to flood the floor.

'Reveal your name,' Frannie ignored them, and her own terror.

A river of blood pushed up the drain covers, gathering into a wave that broke over them both. Then six angels appeared holding instruments of torture. They marched towards her. Frannie swallowed the hard, dense lump of terror in her throat.

'Reveal your name,' she willed IT.

The angels disintegrated. Then God appeared in the form of a silver dancer, surrounded by orbiting rings, packed with life. God turned gracefully but her eyes were cold and distant, unloving. Uncaring. Frannie sobbed. It was *the dream*. The dream where God didn't care, and Frannie was damned.

'No, NO!' she screamed at his frightened face, bashing his head into the floor. 'That's a lie! You're a LIAR! In nomine patris, et filii, et spiritus sancti, in Jesus' name I command you to reveal yourself NOW!'

Pennywise's face split wider, opening his throat and three orbiting orange lights glowed there. Frannie stared. The voices! Where were the voices coming from? She could hear children laughing and running. The light dragged her in, threatening annihilation.

'You come with me,' she hissed at his exposed soul core. 'You come with me, you *CUNT*!'

The lights pulsed, thrumming a bass note that shook her bones. Then she saw it, the truth of him. Something was burning her. Her crucifix! She dropped it, staring at her blistered fingers. And she *knew*.

'No, NO!' Pennywise shrieked. 'ENOUGH! You win, you WIN!' his face knitted back together, his eyes rolled back in anguish. 'I am APOPHOS!'

Frannie sobbed. 'Bastard!' she cried, trying to smack him into the concrete again. She didn't have the strength.

Now she understood. Those awful lights had told her everything. He was an elemental force of chaos and destruction, a consumption sent to end worlds in preparation for reseeded, created and dispatched to Earth by God.

'No,' she sobbed, almost collapsed on his chest. 'No, no. I can't kill you!' Her chest heaved. 'You deserve to die but it can't be me.'

Pennywise unseated her easily, gathering his long limbs under him. He was going to kill her. Frannie knew that. Only one could survive this and the burns on her fingers proved she was already damned. She hung her head in profound exhaustion. He picked her off the floor by the throat.

'Time to float,' he hissed.

'William. William, please.'

Suddenly his face changed, revealing the childlike clown with the buck teeth.

'William,' she gazed into the endless blue of his human eyes. 'Please. Fight. Fight for Violet. For your boys.'

His face morphed, skin burned and peeled away, an eerie echo of the fate of his children. Frannie whimpered in fear.

'William Penrose,' she clutched his squeezing hands. 'She *loved* you.'

Penrose gained control, releasing her suddenly.

'Run,' he said, staggering away from her.

She hesitated. 'You'll catch me.'

'RUN!' he screamed like a dying rabbit. 'Run, ***RUUUUUN!***'

---

**Only one more chapter to go now.**



## 4. Chapter 4

### The Case of William Penrose Chapter 4

Frannie surged towards the exit, leaving the light, the climbing gear and Mac's mangled corpse. She splashed through the freshwater stream, breathing so loud and fast she thought her lungs would burst. She slipped on the rusty ladder trying to climb, freeing a cloud of choking dust that smelled like stone.

The inhuman screams of a legion of monsters echoed out of the deep, pursuing her. She hauled herself to the top of the ladder, choking on dust and ran blindly, throat burning, tears wet on her face. She sucked breath through her bared teeth, sobbing as she tripped and staggered through stinking, cold water towards those distant skylights.

Frannie staggered into the sun, ditching on her bloody knees in the stream as a helicopter blew the branches wide, setting down on a temporary landing pad, spilling the recovery crew. A plume of intolerable heat blasted from the pipe opening. Frannie yowled in absolute agony as it skinned her back. Whimpering, spit running down her chin to mix with her tears, she swayed, then toppled into the cold water, howling and contorting in pain until her throat bled and her voice broke. Then she screamed inside.

---

Frannie woke slowly, fighting the undertow of general anesthesia. Swallowing her own spit hurt. Something sharp jabbed at the back of her left hand and she felt tape on her face. A steady stream of oxygenated air pumped into her nose via a plastic tube. It was cold like mountain air. Her eyes stung and her head thumped, but her throat hurt the most. She felt like she'd gone down on a steel cable. She spat up congealed spit and clotted blood and shielded her eyes as she sat up. The burning in her shoulders was gone. She guessed they'd put her back together the same way she'd fixed Mac's broken arm. Hot tears prickled, threatening.

*Mac. Mac's dead.*

'You're awake,' a broad, triangular male nurse interrupted her thought train. He checked her plastic wristband and clipped a pulse monitor onto her index finger. 'How do you feel? Any pain?'

'My throat hurts.'

'Our intubation tubes can leave some soreness.'

Frannie noticed his strange eyes, so green that they were almost yellow. They were hauntingly pretty.

'Can I have some water?'

'Sure. Sit tight.'

The private room door clicked and Frannie hauled herself from the bed, exhaustion numbing her legs. She dug through her messenger bag, valiantly ignoring the blood spatters that stained it. Her eyes prickled with memories. Was Pennywise dead? What was going to happen to Penrose?

'You should lay down. You have a concussion,' said the returning nurse, catching hold of her in warm, strong hands.

'No, I need to find out what happened to him!'

The satellite mobile Frannie had been searching in her bag for trilled loudly, vibrating in her hands. She swallowed hard and picked up the call.

'Frannie Howard?'

'So. You are alive.'

Sobourne. Frannie gripped the phone tighter.

'Yes, ma'am.'

'Good. I hate a waste of talent. What have you got for me?'

'The clown is a bonded spirit possession. The occupier is Apophos, a...primordial...elemental demon.'

'As we suspected. Shame. Any data from further study would be valuable, but it's out of my hands.'

'What do you mean?'

'Apparently, he'd too dangerous for study. Decision made. He's scheduled for 18:00 tonight.'

'But Penrose is innocent!'

Silence.

'You have an attachment to saving things. As far as I can see, you already tried to help him and the occupier nearly killed you.'

'If you'd just let me see him, I can finish the Rite and free Penrose-'

'Forget him. That's an order. I want you to rest. Get better. Then you're in Romania for the 26th.'

Frannie wanted to cry. It was as she'd dreaded. They needed Penrose to contain Apophos. They were going to murder the man, to kill the demon.

'Howard?'

'Yes, ma'am?'

'Condolences on Mackenzie. She was a decent officer, if a bit overzealous.'

'Thank you,' Frannie said numbly.

The line clicked dead. Frannie dropped the handset on the bed, her head on the heel of her hand.

'Shit,' she hissed, close to tears.

'Love interest?' her nurse asked, his smile hinting at a romantic disposition.

'What? No! Of course not. I hunt monsters for a living. Doesn't exactly open the door to finding Mr Right.'

He chuckled. 'Neither does nursing but I found my Mr Right.'

Frannie read his ID. Jake. Jake with the yellow eyes.

'It's not perfect. I miss dinner a lot. But no matter what time I get in, there's a kiss and something plated up. It's the little things.'

'I'm not in love. It's not that.'

How could she even begin to explain it? Frannie studied the blisters left by her rosary. Someone had left a new one on the nightstand. She was afraid to touch it.

'I saw a man inside the monster. I saw...his soul. I think. He's here for a reason. It's important. I'm supposed to protect him.'

'So do it.'

'If you met him you'd want to run far and fast. That's what I should be doing.'

'So?'

'So what?' Frannie wasn't following.

'What's he like?'

Frannie gazed at the strips of evening light that fell through the blinds, a tidy rib-cage pattern on the carpet and tried to pick out glaring qualities without specifying diet, habitat or temperament.

'Insanely strong. Intelligent. Oddly principled. Childlike. Loyal. Always hungry.'

'He sounds dreamy.'

'He's not.'

'What does "scheduled" mean?'

'It means they're going to execute him. They'll seal him inside the nuclear reactor and open the blast door. It's the only way to kill something so strong.'

'Sounds gnarly.'

Frannie thought about it, her heart rising into her throat. Tears pricked at her eyes. The last day rushed in like a tide. Her breath hitched and something broke inside her. A door opened and she knew. Penrose was the key to her own salvation.

Suddenly she grabbed her bag, riffling through it until she found her ID card.

'I can't do this anymore,' she said quietly. 'I don't want to be their left hand of God.'

Jake's yellow eyes seemed to luminesce. He spoke up.

'Apophos is a curse, Frannie. We'd all feel safer if there was someone around to temper him.'

'What?' Frannie's voice hitched.

'Go.'

Frannie gaped.

'I'll cover for you.'

'How do YOU know about Apophos?'

Suddenly the room flashed through sixty shades of darkness and in Jake's place stood a broad hunchback, six feet tall though he was haggard and bent like an old man. His heavy leather hood stirred in a phantom breeze, revealing flashes of his glowing, otherworldly eyes. The Hunchback! The deal-maker who'd put Apophos inside Penrose! Frannie sucked in a breath, her skin alive and prickling with purpose. The hunchback disappeared in an arc of blinding light, leaving nothing but the smell of ozone and a doctors white-coat on her bed.

Frannie tugged her clothes on and tossed her hospital gown. She put the doctor's coat on and carrying her bag low by her knee, she slid out of her room into a busy corridor. She shed her plastic ID band into a bin and headed for the elevators, her heart straining, breathing too fast. She waited, sucking in forced slow breaths to calm her

panic. Someone would notice soon if she didn't get it together. She glanced at her watch. Twenty-seven minutes to go.

'Shit!' she whined, hammering the call button until the doors finally hissed open. A pregnant woman, complete with husband and four kids took their time getting out. Fidgeting, Frannie dashed inside and was forced to wait while a nurse wheeled in an old man with a golf-ball sized cancer hanging off his throat. Finally, the doors closed.

'Bugger,' the nurse swore, half way down the shaft, searching her pockets. 'Doctor?'

Frannie rocked on her heels anxiously.

'Doctor!'

Frannie jumped when the woman touched her arm.

'You got a back door code? I lost mine.'

Frannie nearly choked on her own air. The LED counter above the door showed 5...4...3...2-

'Sorry,' Frannie tried to sound calm and convincing. 'I lost mine too.'

The doors opened onto a busy lobby. A skinny boy had thrown up and two paramedics flanked him. He was staring at his own shaking hands. Frannie sympathized. She felt disassociated from reality too. She crossed the lobby as fast as she dared, her hands sweating.

She hit the rotating door and spilled into the evening light, sucking lungfuls of fresh air like she'd just come up from a free dive. Towering over the squat, grotty little city, the cathedral bells tolled. Frannie looked past the spire, into the distance where the nuclear reactor crouched, threatening, at the center of a nest of buildings, like the queen over her workers.

Frannie rounded the corner, nearly tripping down three shallow stone steps. She ditched the white-coat into some bushes, panicking. *What do I do? Jesus, how do I fix this?*

A pizza delivery bike lay unattended on the street, handle-bars

poking at a grungy mess of rotten newspaper. Frannie waited until she was sure nobody was watching then she grabbed the bike. She nearly toppled trying to get going. Her heart felt like it was trying to escape. An angry driver slammed on the brakes an inch from her front tyre, yelling obscenities about foreign workers as she dodged. He waved a wrench like he wanted to smack her with it.

The power plant loomed as Frannie pedaled frantically. Not one bit of this made any sense to her. Not what she'd seen in his deadlights. Certainly not her insistence that he had to live.

'Fuck it,' Frannie said, ditching the bike around the corner from the visitors gate. 'Just *fuck* it.'

She didn't need to understand, not right now. Right now she just had to save him.

She straightened her dirty hair as best she could with no mirror and no comb. She pulled a clipboard out of her bag in an effort to look more official and gripped her plastic ID in shaking fingers. She approached the gate. The security guard eyed her from the booth. Frannie tried to smile but it came out twisted. She covered it by pretending to nurse a twisted ankle. Schooling her face, she faced the guard.

'Frannie Howard. Witness for the Execution.'

'Sure,' he checked her ID thoroughly. Frannie fidgeted, anxious. She forced her face into a mask of confidence even as a bead of sweat ran between her eyes. She swiped it away, pretending it was an eyelash.

'Go on in. Reception is third on the left.'

'Thanks,' she nodded, not brave enough to coax another smile from her adrenaline saturated flesh. She walked briskly into the building, avoiding reception and dashing straight into an elevator.

Twelve minutes. She was going to be sick. Her heartbeat rang in her ears as she took the elevator to the fifth floor. The doors opened onto a long, familiar silver corridor that jutted like a bridge over to the reactor dome. The walkway led thirty yards down a gentle incline to

the blast doors, in front of which eight burly marines, all armed to the teeth, surrounded familiar wisps of orange hair.

*What the hell do I say? Jesus, help me, please!*

Frannie hurried towards the guards, failing to notice Sobourne and her two witnesses until it was too late.

'Howard!' Sobourne sounded genuinely surprised. She'd changed her grey hair back to black since Frannie had last seen her. It made her look less like a friendly old lady than ever.

'What the hell are you doing here?' she demanded, her voice roughened by years of cigar smoke.

Pennywise's head snapped around, the blue gaze of William Penrose intense and curious.

'He's coming with me,' Frannie's voice shook. 'You don't understand how important he is. I do.'

All the confusion on Sobourne's face ran off her skull like runny egg. Silence stretched like a hungry panther as Frannie stared her down.

'Arrest her.'

The marines lunged.

'You have to stop the execution!' Frannie yelled, fighting their hands. 'Please, listen to me!'

'Listen to you?' Sobourne scoffed. 'She's insane. That FREAK has broken her.'

'If you kill him you only help Apophos!'

'Nothing could survive this. I've changed my mind,' Sobourne said. 'Throw her in too.'

'WHAT!?' Frannie backed up reflexively but the marines wrestled her into line behind Pennywise. His hands and feet were bound with carbon fiber, his silk costume covered in his blood. He was bruised,



two of his fingers broken, from torture, Frannie guessed.

'Died of her injuries,' Sobourne smiled like Pennywise, making Frannie cold with fear. 'What a shame.'

'BITCH!' Frannie spat, quaking with fear and rage.

The blast doors opened with a mechanical hiss, revealing a polished interior big enough for six people. The guards prodded Pennywise over the line, earning a warning growl, then they shoved Frannie in too. She stumbled, colliding with Pennywise's silky back. He twisted like a snake and bit three of the guards fingers off.

Frannie scrambled away from the blood as Pennywise crunched them like bread-sticks. The guard reeled back, clutching his mangled hand, white in the face. Sobourne smacked the door release. The capsule closed, hissing as it pressurized.

'Shit, shit, SHIT!' Frannie was almost hyperventilating.

His hot coal eyes looked weary. Under the capsule's harsh blue lights it was easier to see the bruises on his skin. She noticed new tears in his costume. Desperately, she dug through her pockets for a way out of this Hell.

'What are you doing?' he asked.

'Getting us out of here. I hope.'

Frannie found the safety pin. She pried it open and went to work on his leg cuffs.

'Why?' he asked. 'Why would you help me?'

'What I saw in your deadlights. I don't understand it either. I just know I have to do this.'

His face split into a wide smile.

'Sarrat Irkalli,' he said.

'What?'

The cuffs gave, hitting the floor. Pennywise bent like an old world gentleman offering a bow to a lady, offering his over-sized head. They'd put a custom halo on him. Frannie guessed it was powerful enough to limit his supernatural abilities. She pulled it off. When he looked up, Frannie's heart stopped. She swallowed hard. The manacles that still bound his wrists groaned and snapped apart, freeing his hands.

Frannie gasped, suddenly standing on her toes to avoid impalement. His claws were sharp under her chin, his face so close she could smell his breath and see the liquid fire convecting in his irises.

'You tried to free him and kill me!' his voice snapped through every bone in her body. Her stomach flipped. She knew, this was no longer Penrose. She was at the mercy of Apophos.

'You murdered Mac!'

'She was trying to kill me!' he growled, his painted red nose an inch from hers.

'I know,' Frannie gripped his wrist in both hands, trying to keep her balance. Up close, his buck-teeth suddenly looked much sharper. 'I'm not going to lie to your face and say she didn't deserve some of what she got. But William...this monster is going to roll over everything if we don't stop him. You have to help me.'

His hand tightened, choking her.

'What makes you think I want to change?' he leaned in, breathing in her scent. Frannie bit down on a whimper. 'I-am-*darkness*,' he hissed. 'The *destroyer* of *worlds*. Not your PET.'

'But I see it in your eyes,' she pleaded, tears stinging her eyes.

'What?' he demanded, searching her face. 'What do you see?'

'My redemption.'

He scoffed, a growl reverberating, making her bones shake.

'Ol' Pennywise will keep rolling. Because I want him to. Maybe I

should stay in here, hmm?'

'Don't.'

'Why?' he snapped, giving her a shake.

'I don't want you to.'

'You'll have to do better than that.'

The burning tears spilled, leaving hot tracks on her skin.

'I need you to help me. I'm damned. We're supposed to help each other.'

Pennywise leaned in, fiery eyes searching her soul like an open book.

'Sweet,' he said suddenly, with uncharacteristic softness, biting his lip with one sharp front tooth as his gaze dropped to her lips. Frannie was suddenly very aware of his proximity and the incredible warmth that radiated off him. 'Fear is sweet. But this is better.'

Frannie jumped wildly as the inner containment doors hissed and the roar of the reactor became audible behind the safety doors.

*It's too late, she realised. I took too long. Maybe he just wants to die. But I don't!*

'Oh God, NO!' Frannie wailed, as light blasted in, but there was no heat and no instant death. The reactor core sang. She knew something was wrong. She should be dead, but there was a towering hybrid of a spider and a centipede standing between her and the core. With four of his eight crab-like arms, he whipped the core into a glowing orb of energy, compacting it, draining it, feeding on it. He sucked on it until the light dimmed, the reactor sputtered, then the light failed.

IT turned, reptilian scales hissing. His eight eyes glowed like fire in the absolute dark. That fiery light cast just enough of a halo for Frannie to see his alien body. She clutched her knees, curled at his feet.

The capsule burst into blue light.

The hybrid monster was gone. Pennywise stood there, no longer gaunt and starving. He looked full of the malicious sort of strength that she feared the most.

Pennywise glared at the containment doors as though their very existence offended him. They groaned like a submarine hull collapsing at crush depth then snapped free, flipping out into the silver corridor, beheading one guard instantly and crushing another.

Pennywise walked through unharmed, brushing imaginary dust off his now pristine costume with the jingle of little bells. Sobourne's eyes went wide, showing too much white, her mouth dropping into an O of absolute horror as she screeched, lunging at her, mouth open, to tear a grapefruit-sized chunk off flesh out of her throat. Frannie closed her eyes, turning her face away from the screams of the guards and the gunshots. Warm, wet mist peppered her face and exposed skin.

When everything was silent, she opened her eyes. She was covered in misted blood. Pennywise stood on a pile of broken bodies, drenched in blood, holding a fresh heart. He stepped over the broken men and offered it to her like a gift. The metallic scent hit the back of her throat and suddenly, she was hungrier than she'd ever been in her life, but instead of accepting the offering, she bent double and gagged.

'We have to go,' she managed. 'They'll send the national guard. The army.'

'I'll drink them all dry,' he sounded like he was comforting her.

Frannie stared anxiously at the blood on his costume. Instantly, the mess disappeared from her skin too and Pennywise was standing much, much closer.

'Don't,' she pleaded. 'You can feed on other things? Other energies, right?'

His stray eye wandered to the left. Despite it, Frannie knew he was

watching her intently. 'Please,' she touched his warm, solid chest and felt unexpected muscle. He leaned in like a cat enjoying the touch. Frannie pulled away sharply but his gloved hands shot out to stop her retreat. Coming closer, Frannie sensed what he wanted to do and she resisted until his fingers dug into her ribs so hard she couldn't fight anymore.

He bent his head and kissed her on the mouth. Frannie made a noise of worry, which earned her a chuckle, but he wasn't trying to eat her. His sharp teeth were tucked away out of sight, and it was a pair of soft, painted lips that met hers. His eyes slid shut, ginger eyelashes tickling her cheek as he snaked one sneaky hand up her back to hold the back of her head. Frannie didn't like that, it felt too much like he wouldn't let her pull away.

'Sarrat Irkalli,' he whispered again, some ancient language, she guessed, and this time when his mouth met hers, light and colour flashed across her inward eye, making her gasp and jolt in terror as she understood. Her redemption was his ascension, from demon to lover, father, benign God. She was born for him. She jerked wildly as these realizations played across her brain, frightened and horribly intrigued. He wasn't forcing the kiss, only holding her steady. When he pulled away Frannie realized, he'd set the first tingling warmth of arousal aflame between her legs.

Closer now than he'd ever been, he brought his body so close that she could feel the lithe, strung strength in his whole frame, like a suspension bridge primed to snap. He was animal, predator. But the way he cupped her face in a warm silk glove, didn't feel animal. Frannie tried to step away.

'No,' he pulled her back. 'Mine. Mine, all mine.'

'I can't-' she tried protesting but it sounded weak and Pennywise growled, buck teeth flashing, eyes flaring orange for a moment until she stopped trying to escape his hold and let him touch her.

'W-We have to hide you,' she tried to change the subject. 'The Brotherhood won't give up. They'll come looking. I'll...help you.'

'We'll go together,' he checked.

'Yes,' she whispered, feeling like she was making a deal with the devil.

'Pennywise is a good teacher. I'll teach you. You'll see. You'll want to be mine.'

'I don't,' she said.

'Don't lie to me,' his voice hardened, eyes flicking down. 'I can SMELL you.'

'In my mind I don't want you.'

'You will,' he promised, pulling a string into view. She looked up. Attached to it was a bright red balloon, with the words **I Love Derry** printed on it. 'Do you want a balloon?'

'N-no,' she whispered, sensing that if she played his game it would work out badly for her.

'Take it,' he insisted, with enough bite to his voice that she obeyed.

The world melted around them, the power plant, the silver corridor. Everything swirled and ran together like a painters palette under hot water. Everything went dark as countries flashed by, then continents. The world spun and spun, years passed, Frannie reached for the planet Earth, floating alone in space, trying to stop the advance of time as it tore her further and further from everyone she knew and loved. A turtle bigger than the planet floated by, casting a glowing yellow eye her way and swam on through the vast gulf of space.

Then it all stopped. Colours solidified into objects. A desk, a lamp, a chair. A red carpet. She and Pennywise stood together in a spacious Mediterranean villa that overlooked a bright blue swimming pool, bluer even than the distant Spanish sea. She understood. They were far in the future, far enough that nobody would know to look for her, nobody would remember. This was their home, Mr and Mrs Gray – if anyone ever asked – and Frannie knew that in the deepest sub-level of their basement complex, his three dead-lights orbited like battling suns in the dark, over a pit of the metal formed by his impact a million years before, extending control over yet another town, this

time, a once fishing village on the south coast of Spain.

As far as the locals were concerned, they were expats who'd hit the big time on the British Lotto, and moved to the sunny coast where Spaniards went for their summer break. Frannie stared at the distant beach, her eyes full of hot, painful tears, her throat closed as Pennywise's hot, impossibly tall body warmed her from behind.

*God, help me*, she prayed.

---

The End? If you enjoyed, please leave a review! :)